

We claim:

*Subs* 1. A method for awarding bonuses over a gaming network having a plurality of gaming machines interconnected by a network, the method comprising the steps of:

- 5       allowing play to occur on a plurality of gaming machines;
- setting an upper threshold;
- accumulating a bonus pool responsive to play on the gaming machines;
- selecting a first subset of the plurality of gaming machines when the accumulated bonus pool crosses the upper threshold;
- 10      sending a bonus token signal to at least one of the first selected subset of the plurality of gaming machines; and
- initiating a bonus period at only the at least one of the first selected subset of gaming machines responsive to the bonus token signal.

2. The method of claim 1, further including the step of paying out bonus awards from the bonus pool during the bonus period.

3. The method of claim 2, further including the steps of:  
      decrementing the bonus awards paid during the bonus period from the bonus pool to yield an adjusted bonus pool amount;  
      setting a lower threshold;  
      removing the bonus token signal from the first selected subset of gaming machines when the adjusted bonus pool amount crosses the lower threshold; and  
      ending the bonus period contemporaneous with the step of removing the bonus token signal.

4. The method of claim 1 further including the steps of:  
      accumulating a temporary bonus pool during the bonus period responsive to play of the gaming machines during the bonus period; and  
      transferring the temporary bonus pool into the bonus pool at the end of the bonus period.

5. The method of claim 4 wherein the step of accumulating the temporary bonus pool during the bonus period responsive to play of the gaming machines during the bonus period excludes those machines in the first subset of gaming machines.

35 > 6. The method of claim 1 wherein the first selected subset of machines is a number greater than one.

5 7. The method of claim 1, further including the steps of:  
removing the bonus token signal from the first selected subset of gaming machines;  
ending the bonus period contemporaneous with the step of removing the bonus token  
signal from the first selected subset of gaming machines;  
selecting a second subset of gaming machines; and  
10 initiating a bonus period at only at least one of the second selected subset of gaming  
machines responsive to the bonus token signal.

14 8. The method of claim 1, further including the step of reserving the bonus token at  
a bonus server coupled to the network until the first threshold is crossed.

15 9. A gaming machine network comprising:  
a plurality of gaming machines, each of said machines having a machine control  
interface adapted to operate said gaming machine in either a normal operation mode or a bonus  
operation mode;  
a bonus server linked to the plurality of gaming machines over a network, said bonus  
server including selection means for identifying at least a selected one of the plurality of gaming  
machines and signal generation means for generating a bonus token signal; and  
20 signal transmission means for sending the bonus token signal to the machine control  
interface of at least the selected one of the plurality of gaming machines responsive to the  
selection means,  
25 wherein the selected one of the plurality of gaming machines switches from the normal  
operation mode to the bonus operation mode responsive to the bonus token signal being  
received at the machine control interface.

30 10. The gaming machine network of claim 9, further comprising:  
a player server linked to the plurality of gaming machines, said player server including a  
database of player accounts;

B5 } player account identification means located at each of the plurality of gaming machines  
for identifying a player, associated with a respective player account stored within the player  
server, at the selected one of the plurality of gaming machines;  
means for sending a flag signal to the player server responsive to the bonus token; and  
5 means for flagging the respective player account responsive to the flag signal.

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